

Preventing Chronic Disease Fit & Healthy Kids

Vermont
Department
of Health



Governor's Fit & Healthy Kids Initiative • January 21, 2004

To reduce the burden of chronic disease in Vermont, Fit & Healthy Kids is a coordinated, comprehensive approach to promoting healthy eating and increasing physical activity among children and families.

The Facts

- Overweight and obesity among children in Vermont is increasing at an alarming rate
- One in five children in the U.S. are overweight (there is no reason to believe Vermont is different)
- 26% of Vermont children in grades 8 to 12 are overweight for the age and height
- 17% of Vermont children in grades 8 to 12 had daily physical education classes
- 35% of Vermont children in grades 8 to 12 spend three or more hours daily watching TV, playing video games or playing with computers
- Overweight among 2- to 5-year-old WIC participants increased from 6% in 1981 to 13% in 2002
- Children who make healthy food choices and are physically active are healthier and are better prepared to do well in school

The Effects

- Overweight children and adolescents are more likely to develop diseases like type II diabetes
- Overweight children tend to become overweight adults at higher risk for chronic diseases including heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and stroke
- Overweight children are often the target of discrimination and teasing which can lead to low self-esteem and depression

The Environment

- Vermonters, and particularly children, are being bombarded with ads, junk food, soft drinks and candy—on TV, in stores, and often at school and at home
- Serving sizes are “supersized” both at home and in restaurants
- There are fewer opportunities for physical activity in school and, more often than not, young people are driven to activities rather than walking or biking to get there

Fit & Healthy Kids

- Fit & Healthy Kids is not a single strategy or a one-shot deal, it is a comprehensive approach for addressing a complex issue.
- Conventional wisdom has been that being overweight is an individual's problem and that it is an individual responsibility to maintain a healthy weight. However, in order for people to succeed, we need to create an environment where children (and adults) can make healthy food choices and become more physically active so that they can lead the healthiest lives possible.
- The Department of Health is working with the Department of Education to coordinate this initiative among state agencies including the departments of Buildings and General Services, Transportation, and the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. Success will require the joint efforts of government, health care, schools, business groups, employers, insurers, community groups and others around the state.

Key Community Strategies

Every community has its own very individual approach to improving health. These community strategies will provide a flexible way to address children's needs, not a cookie cutter approach.

- **Community Health and Fitness Grants**, modeled on the successful New Directions under-age substance abuse prevention grant program, will be offered to community coalitions throughout the state. These will allow communities to carry out “best practice” initiatives for increasing healthy eating and physical activity such as RunGirlRun.
- **Community Recreation Grants** will continue to provide communities with resources to develop outlets like playgrounds, ball fields or recreation trails where children and youth can engage in healthy activities.
- **Coordinated School Health** programs make the link between health and learning and create health advisory councils to help make every school environment as healthy as possible.
- **Governor's Awards** program to recognize local schools with policies and practices that reflect a high priority on improving student health.

Key Statewide Strategies

The Department of Health and other state agencies and organizations will support community efforts with funding, training, technical assistance, information, help evaluating results, social marketing and system-wide improvements.

- **Best and Promising Practices** will be made available to community coalitions, schools, day care facilities and other organizations and individuals who want to join this effort.
- **Countermarketing** will include a range of social marketing, media, communication and wellness activities to create awareness of factors that contribute to—and prevent—overweight across all age groups.
- **Fit & Healthy Kids Day and Green Mountain Winter Games for Children** will provide seasonal awareness-raising venues and feature traditional Vermont outdoor activities like skiing, snowshoeing and skating.
- **Improving Primary Care** with health care provider training, new tools and systems to better address obesity and physical activity issues for children and families in the health care setting.
- **Improving Child Care** by broad use the successful Vermont Fit WIC Activities Kit which provides tools to help foster children's health and development through daily active physical play. This kit gives children and providers a “grab bag” of play activities that they can do anytime and any place.